

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SAA-01 CIAE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 MCT-02
HA-05 AID-05 CCO-00 FBOE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSC-05 SP-02 OC-06 OPR-02 PA-01 USSS-00
CA-01 A-02 SCS-06 OMB-01 SS-15 SY-05 SES-02 IO-14
ACDA-12 /130 W

-----004859 281419Z /40

O P 281136Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9849
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM
CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON ENG
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER
COMSIXTHFLT
CTF SIX ZERO
CTF SIX ONE
CTF SIX TWO
CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA
FOSIF ROTA SPAIN
DIA WASHDC
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5662

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, ASEC, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION: SEPT. 28, 1978 - 1330 HOURS LOCAL

REF: BEIRUT 5640 (DTG 271152Z SEP 78)

1. SITUATION IN BEIRUT HAS TAKEN A CHANGE FOR THE WORSE.

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FROM ABOUT 1230 TO 1300 HOURS ON SEPT. 28 ABOUT 60 ARTILLERY
ROUNDS HIT IN THE SEA ABOUT 500 METERS OFF THE COAST IN
FRONT OF AYN MREISSE AND THE PORT. AT LEAST TWO ROUNDS HIT
THE PORT DIRECTLY. NO SHIPS WERE DAMAGED, HOWEVER, AND ALL
HAVE SAFELY MOVED OUT TO SEA. AS OF 1330 HOURS THERE IS
HEAVY FIGHTING IN ASHRAFIYAH AND THE REST OF THE EAST BEIRUT
AREA, BUT THE OFF-SHORE SHELLING HAS STOPPED. WEST BEIRUT

REMAINS RELATIVELY CALM.

2. AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME AS THIS SHELLING TO PHALANGE POLITBURO MEMBER KARIM PAKRADOUNI, TWO ROCKETS HIT IN THE AREA OF THE GRAND SERAIL IN WEST BEIRUT WHERE THE PRIME MINISTER HAS HIS OFFICE. IN ADDITION, PAKRADOUNI SAID, TWO ROUNDS STRUCK IN THE COMPOUND OF THE PRESIDENCY AT BAABDA THE EVENING OF SEPT. 27, CAUSING DAMAGE BUT NO CASUALTIES.

3. COMMENT: WE DO NOT KNOW BUT BELIEVE THAT CHRISTIAN MILITIAMEN WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SHELLING OFF THE COAST. THE PURPOSE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN TO DRIVE THE SHIPS OUT OF THE HARBOR AND PERHAPS TO WARN LEBANESE LEFTISTS THAT CHRITSIANS COULD SHELL WEST BEIRUT IF THEY WISHED. IN THIS REGARD, LECAL RESIDENTS OF MOUSAITBE IN WEST BEIRUT REPORTED THAT THE MURABITOUN HAD FIRED A FEW ROCKETS AT EAST BEIRUT THE MORNING OF SEPT. 27. PAKRADOUNI SAID THAT PIERRE GEMAYEL WAS AT THE PALACE ATTEMPTING TO WORK OUT A CEASE-FIRE. PAKRADOUNI BELIEVED THAT THE FIGHTING WOULD BE BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL BUT THIS WOULD TAKE TWO TO THREE DAYS. WE ALSO SUSPECT BUT DO NOT KNOW THAT CHRISTIAN MILITIAMEN INITIATED THIS LATEST ROUND AS A PROTEST AGAINST SARKIS' REPORTED DECISION TO ASK FOR RENEWAL OF THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCES MANDATE.

4. THE FIGHTING BEGAN LAST NIGHT, SEPT. 27, IN EAST BEIRUT
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AND THE SOUTHEASTERN SUBURBS. AFTER A ONE HOUR EXCHANGE OF MORTAR AND MACHINE GUN FIRE EARLY YESTERDAY AFTERNOON (SEPT. 27) THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY WAS REDUCED TO SNIPER ACTION UNTIL 1600 HOURS WHEN THE BATTLE RESUMED. THE SYRIANS USED ROCKETS, TANKS, AND HEAVY ARTILLERY THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE NIGHT OF SEPT. 27-28 AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS WHICH RESPONDED WITH 122 MM AND 155 MM ARTILLERY FIRE. THE SHELLING WAS REPORTEDLY AS INTENSE AS THAT IN EARLY JULY. AFTER A BRIEF LULL IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF SEPT. 28, THE SHELLING RESUMED AND EXTREMELY HEAVY SNIPER FIRE CONTINUED THROUGHOUT EAST BEIRUT. LE REVEIL (PHALANGE) REPORTED THE SYRIANS HAD FIRED SOME 900 MORTAR AND ARTILLERY ROUNDS INTO EAST BEIRUT BETWEEN NOON YESTERDAY AND 0100 HOURS THIS MORNING. THE MIDDLE EAST REPORTER SAID THERE WERE TWO PEOPLE KILLED AND 20 WOUNDED DURING YESTERDAY'S FIRING.

5. COMMENT: EVEN IF TEMPORARILY BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL, THE SHELLING OFF-SHORE FROM RAS BEIRUT ESCALATES THE FIGHTING HERE AT LEAST A NOTCH. IT IS THE FIRST DELIBERATE ACTION OF THIS SORT SINCE THE 1975-76 CIVIL WAR. IT INCREASES THE RISK THAT THE SYRIAN/CHRISTIAN CONFRONTATION MIGHT TURN INTO A GENERALIZED CONFLICT HERE.

PARKER

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